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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003068

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TALABANI PONDERS HOW TO REACH OUT TO SUNNI ARABS,
UPBEAT ABOUT IRAQ'S FOREIGN RELATIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 3044

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Talabani told Ambassador Khalilzad that the Sunni Arabs have to be brought back into the constitution-drafting process, and agreed with the Ambassador's point that the Iraqi Government should provide security for their negotiators to facilitate that return. Talabani noted other steps that will or could be taken to reach out to the disgruntled Sunni Arab population, including an independent investigation of alleged Interior Ministry abuses of Sunni Arab prisoners and targeted releases of Sunni Arab imams now in detention. Talabani confirmed there would be a summit of Iraqi political leaders to finalize the draft constitution. The Ambassador urged Talabani to stand up for strong protection of human rights and women's rights. Talabani pledged he would do so.

¶2. (C) Summary, cont.: Talabani said the U.S. and Iraq must maintain pressure on Syria to stop its help to Iraqi Baathists seeking to destabilize Iraq. He mentioned he had spoken to Jordan's King Abdallah July 22 and urged Abdallah to invite some Iraqi Shia to Amman so that Iran does not have a monopoly on their goodwill. He opined that Iran probably would support the Iraqi Government since its Shia political friends are in power. Talabani reiterated that he condemns PKK terrorist acts against Turkey, but added that Turkey should take political steps to resolve the PKK problem. End summary.

IRAQI GOVERNMENT CONFAB

¶3. (C) President Talabani warmly greeted Ambassador Khalilzad on July 23 and pledged to work closely with him in the months ahead. Talabani noted that the Iraq Transitional Government (ITG) had held a big meeting earlier that day. The three members of the Iraqi Presidency Council, the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and the Deputy Prime Ministers and Judge Midhat representing the judicial system had attended, according to Talabani. The President said they had discussed mainly the constitution drafting process and the need to get Sunni Arabs re-engaged. The Ambassador said it is important to bring the Sunni Arabs into the constitution process, and they will need personal security. Talabani readily agreed. He said the Sunni Arabs initially thought they would not need personal security, but the murder of Mijbil Shaykh Issa had shown they were wrong. Talabani reported that Prime Minister Jafari had promised to provide the Sunni Arabs cars and arms and funds to pay for bodyguards. Talabani also said the Sunni Arabs want more time to discuss draft text produced by the national assembly sub-committees. The President thought this a reasonable request.

¶4. (C) Talabani added that the discussion among the government leadership on July 22 was very heated at times. In particular, he said, TNA speaker Al-Hassani and Prime Minister Jafari had had sharp exchanges. Talabani noted that they had agreed in the meeting to set up a special committee under the Iraqi judiciary to investigate the Sunni allegations of the security forces' abuses against Sunni Arabs. Talabani confided that he is unsure of the extent of the abuses, but he thinks there is a problem.

¶5. (C) Talabani said the Iraqi detainees held by the Coalition are an issue that must be resolved. He said a committee needs to be set up to investigate charges against each detainee. If there is evidence against them, their cases should go to an Iraqi court for judgment. If there are doubts about the evidence, the detainees should be released with guarantees from their families or local imams or tribal leaders. Talabani said it would be useful releasing some of the Sunni Arab imams in detention. He doubts that all the religious men detained are supporting terrorism. Talabani added that arresting suspects at night is not helpful. Arrest operations should be conducted in daylight and with judicial orders to demonstrate there is rule of law in Iraq. Arresting persons at night who are later reported dead makes it difficult to say whether they were arrested by security forces or killed by terrorists dressed as security forces, said Talabani. Judicial orders would help clarify responsibility for killing.

CONSTITUTION SUMMIT

16. (C) Talabani said that the key political leaders of Iraq should come to Baghdad to finalize a deal on the constitution. It would be important for these leaders to represent the government and the national assembly as well as other interested parties. For example, Muhsin Abdel-Hamid from the Iraqi Islamic Party, and a representative of the Arab Nationalist Front should receive invitations. Toward this end, Talabani appreciated the DCM's recent visit to Kurdistan where he had urged Kurdish Regional Government President Masoud Barzani to come to Baghdad (Ref A).

17. (C) The Ambassador urged Talabani to weigh in during the constitutional discussions to support strong measures protecting human rights in general and women's rights in particular. Talabani said he would do so. The Iraqi President pledged that he would not accept Iraq's becoming an Islamic Republic.

TALABANI ON JORDAN: REACH OUT TO SHIA

18. (C) Turning to Iraq's foreign relations, Talabani said he had received a telephone call from Jordan King Abdallah on July 22. Talabani said he had admonished Abdallah for alienating Iraq's Shia population. (Talabani recalled that Abdallah's father Hussein had had good relations with Iraq's Shia and in particular with the brother of former SCIRI leader Mohammad Bahir al-Hakim. The brother, Mahdi al-Hakim, lived in Amman.) Talabani said he urged Abdallah to open the door to Iraqi Shia and invite some to visit Amman. Talabani said that Abdallah agreed. Talabani added that he had urged King Abdallah to convince his fellow Jordanians to cease celebrating the murder of Iraqi civilians in places like Baghdad and Hillah. Even their silence would be insulting; they should be condemning the murders of Iraqis just as the Arab world condemns terrorist acts in places like Sharm ash-Shaykh. Talabani concluded that the Arab world needs a comprehensive policy against terrorism in the region; fashioning such a policy might even warrant an Arab League summit. In the meantime the Iraqi government would approach the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to raise the need for greater international cooperation.

SYRIA IS A SPECIAL CASE

19. (C) Talabani said that Syria is a special case. The Syrians remain in contact with Iraqi Ba'athists trying to destabilize Iraq from inside Syria. Their handover of an Iraqi Ba'athist (Sibawi) was not serious because he had already been negotiating his return to Iraq. Talabani urged that the United States maintain pressure on Syria. Bashar al-Assad is different from Saddam Hussein and will not risk regime change in Syria. Arab leaders like Egypt's Mubarak and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah need to weigh in with the Syrians, Talabani said.

IRAN - THEY WILL BE HELPFUL, PROBABLY

110. (C) Talabani opined that Iran wants to help normalize the situation in Iraq. In Talabani's analysis, Iran's friends are now in power in Baghdad, and the Iranian government should be supportive. Talabani noted that the Iranians had suggested a three-way summit in Tehran between Iraq's Prime Minister, the Syrian President, and the Iranians. Since this would have looked to outsiders like the Shia were arranging the affairs of Iraq, Talabani urged the Prime Minister to maintain pressure on Syria. Talabani cautioned that Iran's relations with Ayatollah Sistani could affect overall relations between Iraq and Iran. Sistani is insisting that the Iraqi Shia be independent of Iran. They have rebuffed Iranian efforts to start construction projects in Najaf, for example. Talabani is not sure that the Iranians easily accept that independence.

TURKISH RELATIONS GOOD OVERALL

111. (C) Talabani said Iraq's relations with Turkey are generally good now. Grinning widely, he said the Turks like him because as President of Iraq he reinforces Kurdistan's place inside a unified Iraq. Talabani said he has advised the Turks to pay attention to Shia Turkmen and to invite them to Ankara to counter-balance Iran's influence with the

Shia-Turkmen. Talabani noted that Ankara recently invited Shia Turkmen leader Abbas Bayati to Turkey. Talabani said the Turks seem satisfied with Talabani's proposal that a definitive determination of Kirkuk's status be deferred two or three years. (COMMENT. Not all Iraqi Kurds agree with this proposal. END COMMENT.) Turning to PKK acts of violence, Talabani said that he condemned the PKK's terrorist operations against the Turks. He added, however, that the Turkish government should take steps towards the PKK militants who want to stop fighting. An amnesty would be useful. So far, the Turkish army has rejected this idea.

¶12. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK,
minimize considered.
Khalilzad